



Meeting Notes 10th February 2025

North West – 7a

15:00 – 17:00 MS Teams Conference Call

Summary

Meeting title	NW RFG Meeting
Attended participants	19
Start time	15:00
End time	16:32
Meeting duration	1h 32m

Attendees

Industry Terry Davies Paul Fagan Steven Brown	MMO Steve Johnston Daniel Wardle Jacob Bestwick Alex Murphy Courtney Inch Jonathan Brooks DEFRA Alan Dell Jonathon Brennan Emma Place	IFCA Mark Taylor Joseph Moulton	Apologies Ron Graham
MCA Kate Web Alec Keep		SEAFISH Sheriene Murphy Rebecca Spain	
CEFAS Kieran Hyder			

Agenda

1. Steve Johnston, MMO – Welcome & Introduction
2. Jacob Bestwick, MMO – Quota Q&A
3. Emma Place, DEFRA – Catch Accounting
4. Alex Murphy, MMO – Whelk FMP Updates
5. Mark Taylor, NWIFCA – NWIFCA Updates, Including Byelaws
6. Sheriene Murphy & Rebecca Spain, SEAFISH – NW Initiative and Workstreams Updates
7. Steve Johnston, MMO – Any Other Business

Contact details

Quota Team:

inshorequotamanager@marinemanagement.org.uk

Katie James – 07469 443 840

Jacob Bestwick – 07747 638 655

Regional Fisheries Groups (RFG) Team:

RFG Team - regionalfisheriesgroups@marinemanagement.org.uk

Dan Wardle - Daniel.wardle@marinemanagement.org.uk

DEFRA Discards Team – Emma Place / Alan Dell / Yuki Lim

discards@defra.gov.uk

Seafish:

Sheriene Murphy - Sheriene.murphy@seafish.co.uk / 07984 565 386 / 0131 380 4575

Rebecca Spain - Rebecca.spain@seafish.co.uk / 07876 035 755

Recording

This meeting was recorded and can be viewed at the following link:

<https://youtu.be/HkJwocl92WA>

All attendees were made aware that the intention was to record the meeting and there were no objections.

Meeting Notes

The below notes are a summarised and paraphrased version of the topics discussed to capture the key points being delivered by the presenters as well as the main comments and questions from other participants.

1. Steve Johnston, MMO – Welcome & Introduction

Steve Johnston introduced himself as the Principal Marine Officer for the Northwest and the chair of this meeting, and all participants provided a quick introduction.

Dan Wardle, liaison for the North West RFG shared updates about recent in port engagement which included attendance of himself, Steve Johnson, Northwest IFCA and the MMO inshore quota team. The emphasis on the January visits were to give fishers an opportunity to understand how inshore quota works, including how industry can submit requests for changes in catch limits and what the quota team can do to help industry to make the most of the fishing opportunities available. Dan shared that there will be further visits later in the year with other organisations, and that fishers should look out for updates on this. But that if there is anything of particular that fishers want before this then they can get in touch with him.

2. Jacob Bestwick, MMO – Quota Update Q&A

Jacob introduced himself as one of the inshore quota managers at the MMO alongside Katie James.

Jacob explained that he would be talking about 2025 quota, but the normal presentation that the quota team deliver won't be included today as the team are still working through uptake data and 2025 final allocations. However, the December 2024 catch limit update which details the provisional catch limits can be found here: [Catch limit video 20241217 161350 Meeting Recording - YouTube](#).

Jacob provided the following updates:

Cod 7a:

Last year Northwest industry members raised to the quota team that the way the bycatch limits of 7a cod was being managed meant there was a choke on catching other target species. In response to this the quota team changed to a quarterly catch limit in the final quarter of last year to allow more flexibility and increased this to 2 tonnes per quarter. The intention is to keep the limits quarterly until March 2025, then drop the limits back to monthly during the summer months. Ahead of the winter fishery this will return to a 2-tonne quarterly limit.

Under 10m non sector vessels do not get a lot of 7a cod allocation, but the quota team have worked to trade in quota and use cross year trades to maintain the quarterly catch limit of 2 tonnes until March. They will continue to trade quota to ensure those limits from October to December.

Sole 7a

There was a change in position on this stock at the start of last year where the catch went to bycatch only. Following an in-year benchmark there was a revision of the TAC back up to a targetable stock. Once this happened, the quota team put the catch limits back up to 2 tonnes per month. The intention is to keep the catch limit at 2 tonnes all year to allow consistency. Since the revision, there has been around a 2% reduction in the TAC this year, but the quota team is anticipating a 10.5 tonne allocation, and 22 tonnes of sole quota has already been traded cross-year, which Katie and Jacob will continue trading in to support a 2-tonne limit.

The quota team welcome anyone to get in contact regarding quota and can be contacted using the below information.

inshorequotamanager@marinemanagement.org.uk

Katie James – 07469 443 840

Jacob Bestwick – 07747 638 655

Questions, Comments & Answers:

Q. Steve Johnson - Are there likely to be any limitations later in the year for skates and rays and / or plaice?

A: Skates and rays had a small cut in TAC. Last year we hit the allocation for area 7 (excluding 7d). The quota was set at 15t per month all year in 2024 and no quota was traded in, so it is not anticipated to be an issue.

For plaice, there has been a 20% cut but we still have allocated over 100 tonnes, and we do not see a very high uptake of it. The catch limit was 8 tonnes per last month last year and the plan is to keep it the same for this year.

3. Emma Place, DEFRA – Catch Accounting

Emma shared a presentation during this section that can be found at the end of this document.

Emma explained that this section was to provide information on discard reform work led by DEFRA that has been underway and will continue this year. The information is to provide some awareness of the work but there will be further information and engagement as the project progresses.

The wider project of discard reform is to look at ways to manage discards in England which is acknowledged to be a complex problem. In this context 'discards' is used as a term for the discarding of quota species that fall under the landing obligation.

The intention is to work with industry to understand the reason behind discarding and the barriers to fishers adopting more selective gears and ways of reducing discards. There was consultation on some discard reform measures in 2023 and the responses to this were published last year ([Discards reform - GOV.UK](#)).

This work is broken down into different topics which includes discard reduction schemes and catch accounting. To give more detail on catch accounting, the intention this year is to look at how we account for catches (both landings and discards) against quota. Currently only landings are counted against quota so there is a risk that we are not accounting for discard losses and therefore catches could exceed UK TAC shares. For the most part this is not the case but some demersal whitefish species it is. There will be no changes this year, so no quota uptake will be impacted in 2025.

In 2024, DEFRA, MMO and CEFAS ran a trial to explore the catch accounting approach and to see if it was possible and how it would work. This will continue in 2025 in a trial format.

If you would like to be involved in this work or have any questions you can contact the team at discards@defra.gov.uk.

Questions, Comments & Answers:

Q. Steve Johnson - There are some discrepancies in landing obligation exemptions such as the ability to discard plaice in the Northeast nephrop fishery but not the Irish Sea nephrop fishery. Presumably this is to do with survivability. Will these sorts of exemptions be looked at?

A. Emma Place - Where DEFRA have made any changes to exemptions this would be based on further evidence from CEFAS. There has been changes in the last couple of years that have been as a result of a CEFAS study in 2021. Emma to get back to Steve with more information on this.

Broadly speaking, this does form part of the trial as we need to look at the interaction with exemptions and TAC as we need to make sure it interacts appropriately with catch accounting.

Q. Steve Johnston – In the Irish sea there are measures that are not in line with other measures, for instance in the nephrop fishery you have to have 5% nephrops to use 80mm gear, otherwise it defaults to 100mm. But then with 100mm gear you can't land more than 10% cod, haddock and skate (combined). This potentially causes a problem for boats who would be using 80mm, as when they stop getting 5% nephrops, they would be catching a lot of skate and potentially need to have to use 120mm gear. This would only be for a short window (6-weeks or so) that they wouldn't be getting the 5%. So, it becomes an issue of when they would be catching 5% again, as it's difficult to catch nephrops if they carry on using 120mm gear. There are a few quirks in the gear regulations that make it complex.

A. Emma Place – we will pick this up with you and take this away for the discard reduction scheme work to better understand what is happening with those gears, as this workstream may be looking at the nephrop fisheries. Emma will pick this up with Steve offline to provide more clarity on the issues.

4. Alex Murphy, MMO – Whelk Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) Updates

Alex shared a presentation that can be found at the end of this document.

Alex introduced himself as being from the FMP Implementation Team at the MMO and provided the following updates.

As a brief overview of the Whelk FMP, the plan outlines how we will achieve long term sustainable management of Whelk fisheries in English waters. The plan was written by Seafish in collaboration from other representatives via the whelk management group.

One of the short-term actions is the introduction of a whelk permitting scheme, though the definition of a permit for this purpose has not yet been determined. In the medium term the FMP will consider minimum conservation reference sizes (MCRS) for whelk, and in the longer term may consider the use of seasonal closures, pot limits, technical gear measures or catch limits. It is one of the primary objectives to improve the evidence base for which these actions can be considered.

In regard to the permit scheme, this is where MMO work is focused at the moment. It will apply to all UK and EU vessels and may carry conditions such as data collection requirements, because as mentioned we are looking to understand more about the fishery and factors such as catch per unit effort and potentially factors such as soak times and pot numbers. We are at the beginning of considering a permit scheme, currently Seafish and the Whelk management group are working on a draft discussion paper which will be delivered to the MMO. This will help to inform the design of any permit scheme.

Once this is complete, we will be making contact with industry either through in person engagement, consultation or calls for evidence. Following that, the MMO will return to DEFRA with the proposal before any type of implementation can occur.

This was just a brief overview of what is going on with the Whelk Fisheries

Management Plan implementation. If there are any questions on anything discussed, you can get in touch with the team at sustainablefisheries@marinemanagement.org.uk.

Questions, Comments & Answers:

Q. Steve Johnson - There are complications in the Irish Sea due to a number of different administrations. What is the time scale for introducing the permit scheme, pot limits and changes to the MCRS?

A. Alex Murphy - It is difficult to say at the moment. The FMP was published in 2023, and the measure was to be implemented within two years of the publication. Hopefully by the end of the year there will be a permit scheme of some description. Things like pot limits and MCRS will come further down the line if they are deemed an appropriate thing to do.

Q. Steve Johnson - How would pot limits be applied as fishers may work in Scottish, Welsh and English waters? Would it be how many can be deployed by the vessel from wherever or by jurisdiction?

A. Alex Murphy - We do not yet know. At the moment pot limits are something that could be considered but has not come to the forefront of the thinking, but I will take that point away.

Q. Steve Johnson - How are the team working with local IFCA's to gather other scientific input to inform what should be done in different areas? Northwest IFCA have recently done quite a bit of research on minimum conservation reference sizes and maturity.

A. Alex Murphy - The whelk management group is currently drafting papers that will be handed over to the MMO. The topic of MCRS is being covered by the science sub group of the whelk management group, and the expectation is that these forms of evidence will be feeding directly into this work as it is collating lots of different evidence and thoughts from various areas.

Comments:

Mark Taylor - NWIFCA have a recommendation to the subcommittee taking place tomorrow (11/02/2025) that whelk minimum sizes should be held at 65mm for the district. For context, the national MCRS is 45mm as per national EU legacy minimum size. A number of years back through our bylaw we were to incrementally increase out MCRS to 55mm, then 65mm and ultimately 75mm as a final MCRS. This was due to come into place last summer, but we put a hold to that to gather more evidence around what the appropriate MCRS should be. This science has happened over the last nine months and culminated in this recommendation (of keeping MCRS at 65mm) to our committee and subcommittee that makes fisheries decisions. The finer details of this can be found on the NWIFCA website ([Homepage - IFCA North West](#)) and it will be published through relevant scientific journals.

Following the recommendation to the subcommittee tomorrow, they will debate, scrutinise and decide on the final outcome on this. At this time we do not know what the final decision will be.

The pot limits for NWIFCA are 1000 for vessels with track record, 400 for those without, and there is a moratorium on applications for new permits to our byelaw. We are looking at the next steps to our whelk work once the MCRS is defined.

5. Mark Taylor, NWIFCA – NWIFCA Updates, Including Byelaws

Mark introduced himself as Chief of Northwestern IFCA and provided the following updates:

The fixed netting byelaw was made by the authority last year, but this is not the end of the process. The byelaw is with the MMO for quality assessment and quality assurance, then ultimately it will go to DEFRA to be scrutinised with a view to confirmation.

The netting byelaw creates a permit regime for any and all forms of fixed netting within the district, whether commercial, shore based or any recreation fixed netting. It gives the ability to have a flexible permit regime where we can create flexible permit conditions based on the nature of the fisheries in areas and changing socioeconomic or environmental situations as they arise. It also acts as a consolidation exercise for legacy byelaws between old Cumbria and Northwestern Sea Fisheries Committee districts so its uniform in terms of management and regulation for fixed nets across the district. Lastly, it revokes legacy byelaws that are no longer needed because of this new netting byelaw or should have been taken of our statute book years ago.

We are in the final phases of drafting a cockle FMP for the district which will be taken to the members and go out to consultation. It is looking at standardising the decision-making processes and the management approaches we take to our cockle fisheries and the parameters by which we survey, how we decide on whether fisheries should be open or not, whether beds should be open and ultimately the basis for management.

Last year our members voted and agreed to implement a 'use it or lose it' policy for our permit holders who have permits to gather cockles. There are 150 individuals who have a permit from us to hand gather cockles and mussels across the district. We have small issues with some people renewing and taking up permits but not actually actively fishing and that suppresses the socio-economic benefit that the permit regime brings to the district. So, we are looking at, under certain circumstances applying a minimum threshold below which we might look to revoke permits if it's not been fished actively over that period. Another angle is a handover scheme for individuals who no longer wish to renew their permit to nominate individuals to take them on. There are a few caveats to this and the idea behind it is focusing on keeping throughput of young people in local communities accessing the fishery, which is difficult, as one would expect with a limited number of permits available. There'd need to be very strict parameters for who a fisher existing the fishery could hand over the permit to, such as direct family relationships, if this policy comes into place. Finally, on the cockle fishery, we are looking to trial an early opening season this year. This was approved to go ahead last year but didn't happen in Morecambe Bay because the beds were not in a position to open early. At the moment our cockle season is September to April and were looking to go with a July to February season; keeping it the same length of season but shifting everything forwards two months. The idea for the trial in Morecambe Bay was raised through

industry representation on our committee, debated and consulted on. We will see how it works for industry, for the authority and then take a decision on the back of that following further feedback from the industry to determine whether it becomes a permanent change to our season. The change would align with most other cockle fishing seasons around the country.

We are moving on to a consolidating byelaw for our mobile nets regulation across the district. This hasn't been shaped up in terms of any text, we just recognise that we need one and provisions for a flexible permit regime as per the fixed net byelaw. We will be going out to initial informal consultation to industry in the coming months to ask for views on what a trawling or mobile net byelaw should look like going forward.

Lastly, we are working with Natural Resource Wales (NRW) on an application for a new regulating order for the Dee cockle fishery. There's a current regulating order in place which NRW manage independently of us. They also manage the cockle beds on the English and the Welsh side of the Dee. This is done under a licence regime for 54 licence holders. That regulating order comes to an end in the summer of 2028 and we need to make an application to replace it. We are currently waiting on DEFRA to come back to us because they are refreshing and updating the application process for shellfish regulating orders. As it is English and Welsh waters, it will need a concurrent application with the Welsh Government for the same regulating order on both sides. Current fishers on our side that access other beds across the northwest may continue to be excluded from that fishery, but this was a members decision to pursue a joint regulating order for the fishery, primarily because without that you end up drawing a line through the middle of the fishery and have two completely different regulatory regimes on either side.

Questions, Comments & Answers:

Q. Steve Johnston - What is the default position if the regulating order for the cockle fishery wasn't put in place?

A. Mark Taylor - On the English side, the beds would come under our byelaw 3 and the 150 permit holders would gain access to the English side of the Dee estuary.

Q. Terry Davies on behalf of Andrew Porter – NWSDC byelaws 26/27 were brought in to protect salmon. When the EA stopped salmon fishing, why were the byelaws not made redundant? Why do fishers have to pay £150 for a permit in the netting byelaw when they have never had to pay in the past.

A. Mark Taylor - The scope of the byelaw goes beyond the conservation of salmon and trout fisheries. It is about any fixed netting activities that go on within the district. To clarify there are three categories or permits in this byelaw, the highest of which is the £150 one mentioned is for commercial vessels that are netting.

There are closed seasons in the estuaries in relation to salmon and trout as part of the byelaw proposal. *Mark agreed to follow up with the industry member to provide more information on the permits.*

Q. Terry Davies on behalf of Simon Ward - Can we get more information on the ban of white bait nets which was said to be coming into force in two years but now may be as early as June 2025?

A. Mark Taylor - As part of the netting permit byelaw that is currently with the MMO for quality assurance, there is no provision to allow for small mesh netting for fish, which effectively makes it prohibited. This will come into effect once passed by DEFRA. At the moment, it is allowed under current byelaws, but our members have decided that in the first iteration this will be prohibited based on current evidence. This is because evidence of the significant and real risk of capturing other undersized and juveniles of different species.

Q. Terry Davies - So it is definitely getting banned is it?

A. Mark Taylor - Yes, as long as the byelaw goes through and is signed off by the Secretary of State. This year, IFCA will be developing a study to look at whitebait filter net fisheries to gather an evidence base to prove if it is a sustainable fishery, and only then could we permit it under the necessary conditions.

C. Steve Brown – provided clarification on the position on when the Environment Agency handed over the provisions for mobile nets with the changes in the salmon act. Responsibility for the byelaws was transferred to NW Sea Fisheries committee with virtually no input. This was a compulsory transfer of a byelaw from the Salmon Act to the SFC. NWIFCA committee are currently 'picking up the mess from that one'.

6. Sheriene Murphy & Rebecca Spain – NW Initiative and Workstreams Updates

Sheriene introduced herself and Rebecca from Seafish and explained that the work that has been underway on the Northwest Seafood Action Plan. Sheriene and Rebecca provided the following updates that were orientated around the progression of this plan and the delivery of parts so far.

Last time Seafish updated the Regional Fisheries Group on the work was back in September 2024. As a reminder the work comes following a report written back in 2022 that made some recommendations of how to improve the supply chain in the Northwest. There has been work surrounding Thornback Ray which has been helping to progress on three of the recommendations which includes digital and social media content, diversification of species in the northwest, and helping with the Northwest branding.

This direction was identified following meetings last year, which indicated there was lots of Thornback Ray on the fishing grounds in the Northwest, and whilst Fleetwood markets were keen for fishers to catch it, fishers were not getting the value required for it to be economical.

Seafish looked at the retail and trade sectors, the species sustainability and thought thornback could benefit from promotion and it would be a good species to help showcase things in the Northwest. From this it was decided to make a film.

The film was produced over three days in September with renowned seafood chef CJ Jackson and Seafish colleagues. The process documented the journey of the thornback ray from arriving in Mary Port and Whitehaven by the fishing vessels, to

Fleetwood auction market, then down to Billingsgate market where CJ runs her seafood kitchen and school. The film included interviews with local fishermen, the processing of different species including skinning of the ray, and preparation of delicious dishes showing a variety of meals with young influencer Max Burns.

You can watch the 12-minute film here: [Thornback ray: from north-west English waters to your plate | Seafish](#)

Alongside this Seafish produced a Thornback Ray factsheet ([Thornback ray factsheet — Seafish](#)), three shorter versions of the film for social media, including LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter and media outlets.

In regard to the factsheet, this tells you a bit about the identification of Thornback, the sustainability of it, and the nutritional benefits. We have designed it so it can be downloaded and readily shared with customers. On our social media channels the videos reached 60,000 people and the average engagement rate was 8.8% which is over double the average of other Seafish social media comments.

We will be re-running the campaign in September and October when the fishery starts to pick up again, and this will include some content that hasn't been used yet, which includes different recipe cards.

The other work being done in the Northwest includes market analysis of sales of Thornback Rays across the country. We are hoping to link this into a transport proposal to look at how we can better connect fishers to markets. We are looking to arrange another supply chain group meeting probably towards the beginning of April. If you'd like to be involved with any future meetings, or get in touch about the Thornback film or other work please get in contact.

The idea is to hopefully look at transport proposals and what pilots we could run to see how well they would work. We will look to see what funding would be available to maybe extend that, but we are just doing all the background work first to try and make it successful.

Sheriene Murphy, Senior Economic Researcher: sheriene.murphy@seafish.co.uk / 07984 565 386

Becca Spain, Senior Economic Researcher: rebecca.spain@seafish.co.uk / 07876 035 755

Questions, Comments & Answers:

Mark Taylor – I think it's a really positive initiative and can only help certainly and really good to raise awareness. You have identified the issue being that the fishermen do get significant quantities but there isn't quite the market for it. I am encouraged that you mentioned looking at transport and supply chains. I think we'd like to keep the market within the northwest, but a lack of competition from buyers is an issue there. You mentioned price which I think is an issue because it isn't economical to land in the quantities they're catching it. I think one thing you're going to focus on with the transport supply chain side of things is the aggregation of transport, so we can get quantities to market which we want to be Fleetwood or

Northwest if possible, but if not it can be argued that fishers should be looking at this themselves, and some of them are, but instead of reaching out to Brixham and saying would you take our skate where they are not getting a positive response, they could go as a co-operative or group of fishers which they may be more interested in. This may focus local buyers minds to maybe up their prices to make it economical. It is all positive, because out of the meetings the MMO ran last month people are finding markets, including for the backs. Though there is a disconnect where people are not and instead are throwing it back. There are not really groups of people working out economics of scale, so I think the next steps looking at transport and supply chain will build on the work you've already done, and I applaud it.

7. Steve Johnston, MMO – Any Other Business

Q. Steve Johnson to Jonathon Bennan: Is there any update in the progression of IVMS?

A. Jonathon Bennan will take this question away to provide an official response as he is currently covering for Andy Carroll.

Q. Terry Davis on behalf of Andrew Porter - Is Bass authorisation changing and how?

A. Steve Johnson - It is not necessarily changing. The Bass FMP has a group and subgroups made up from various different sectors, recreational and commercial fishers. One of the first things they are looking at is the authorisations for bass and whether it needs to be reviewed.

A. Kieran Hyder – I am part of the group. I am not really involved in the authorisation side of things but it was something that was flagged as an issue at the start of the group and that people asked to look at. This doesn't mean things are going to change, just that they will look at the current system to see whether it is fit for purpose. In the Bass management group meeting today we were looking at the evidence requirements and needs from the fisheries management plan. There is a lot of work going on and it's important to recognise that there's a balanced membership across all sectors with an interest in the fishery and government bodies.

Q. Steve Johnson - Is there any information on the difference between use of drift nets and fixed nets? Is there any scope for a small-scale drift net fishery?

A. Kieran Hyder - There have been discussions around drift nets but I don't know whether it is going to be considered in the longer term or not. There is no provision for it in the management structure at the moment.

Q. Steve Johnson - Industry raise the point of the safety element, particularly where there are high tidal streams and where fixed nets can be quite dangerous. Can we ensure it is being considered in the group and that research is being done into it?

A. Kieran Hyder – Kieran will take this question away to the bass management group to get an official response.

C. Terry Davies - There are fishers asking about drifting. It can be unpleasant when your pulling anchors in and the weather can change in an instant. There is an issue with birds, but not like people are making out. It would be good if we can discuss drifting again.

C. Paul Fagan - I think there is scope for a small-scale drift net fishery. I drift netted from a licenced boat from the year 2000 for bass, and when it's done right its brilliant fish, very little bycatch, just bass and mullet and very little spotty dogs. With fixed

gear we are sometimes taking half a tonne of spotty dogs which are going back as well as edible crab. With the modern flexible permits and byelaws, I can't see why there couldn't be a small-scale drift net fishery, say 500 yard and put a permit fee on it. In terms of discards and bycatch it is much better.

We haven't got the water clarity up here for a rod and line fishery which has the bigger quota. A rod and line fisher had one of the worst seasons last year, not because of a lack of bass, but because of smooth hounds. Could emails be put out for the Bass Management group to keep us aware of what's going on as I have heard very little.

Dan Wardle - RFG Updates:

The next online RFG meeting is expected to be in October. In the meantime, we'll be doing port visits and I am keen to get Chris Collins from the MMO who is part of the Bass Subgroup to join us.

Steve Johnson - Catch Recording:

Steve Johnson, provided an update on guidance issues experienced by users of the Catch Recording app. Fishers should follow the below guidance if they find that catch records are failing to send.

We are aware users are encountering issues when trying to submit landing data via the Catch Recording mobile app, specifically catch records failing to send. This follows recent software updates to Apple iOS and Android operating systems.

In the first instance, users are advised to download the latest version of the Catch Recording App from the app store, sign out using the small icon in the top right corner of the app and then log in again using your registered email address and password to automatically re-send any pending catch records.

Some users may continue to experience this issue, particularly those who are using older mobile devices. Where this is the case, they are advised to use the Catch Recording web service at: <https://record-catch.service.gov.uk/sign-in>.

For ease of access, it is now possible to save a shortcut to the web service on device home screens.

You can contact the Catch Recording helpline for support or to submit catch records on the phone at 0300 0203 788 (between 7am and 8pm weekdays to speak with an agent).

Steve Johnson - Capped Licences:

As of 1st of January, DEFRA have removed capped licences for under 10m vessels.

Full information on this change can be found here: [Government response: removing the licence cap on 10 metre and under vessels - GOV.UK](#)

Details on current catch limits for 10m vessels and under can be found here: [Current catch limits: 10 metres and under non-sector pool - GOV.UK](#)

Dan Wardle - RFG Annual Survey

The Regional Fisheries Groups team are inviting fishers to complete a short survey to share thoughts and feedback on the RFGs. The survey will take no longer than 15 minutes and covers questions such as asking your preference on frequency of online meetings, port visits as well as asking for any other feedback that you have.

Please follow this link to complete the survey:

<https://forms.office.com/e/fTbbuGdu9U?origin=lprLink>

The meeting was concluded at 16:32.

Thank you for attending this Regional Fisheries Group meeting. If you would like comment on these or previous minutes, be added to this groups contact list or contribute in any other way please contact the MMO Regional fisheries Mailbox: regionalfisheriesgroups@marinemanagement.org.uk or find out more at the Regional Fisheries Groups webpage: Regional Fisheries Groups - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

Introduction to discards reform in England – RFG North West Meeting:

10 February 2025

Discards/landing obligation policy

- Discards is a complex problem with no simple solution.
- We want to reform how we manage discards in England, and we consulted on these measures and published the responses last year – happy to send links or an overview of the work if helpful.
- Amongst the measures are ways of reducing discards, such as understanding the barriers to fishers taking up more selective gears.
- Another key reform is to account for catches against quota uptake. And this is why we are here, but happy to talk about other discards reforms as well.
- Currently only landings are accounted for against quota uptake, not discards.

Catch accounting – 2024 trial

- We want to change how we account for catches by including discards as well as landings against quota to help us support sustainable fish stocks. This would be for vessels under the English quota system.
- In 2024, we worked with Cefas and MMO as they ran a trial to explore if catch accounting was possible and implications of its approach.
- We want to continue this work during 2025 for an approach to be implemented after then.
- In terms of processes – no impact this year on quota or any processes for you.
- For now, we just want to make you aware of this work. More to come in the future

Any questions?

Policy paper

Fisheries management plan for whelk in English waters

Published 14 December 2023

- Written by Seafish and the Whelk Management Group (WMG)
- Published 14 December 2023.
- Covers all whelk fishing in English waters

...ambitious for our seas and coasts



Policy paper

Fisheries management plan for whelk in English waters

Published 14 December 2023

- Improved evidence base (stock boundaries, stock health, carbon footprint etc.,).
- Whelk **permit/entitlement** scheme – short term.
- Could change/introduce regional minimum landing size – medium term.
- Could introduce seasonal closure, pot limits, gear design measure or catch limits – long term.

...ambitious for our seas and coasts



Policy paper

Fisheries management plan for whelk in English waters

Published 14 December 2023

Permit scheme

- Permit scheme to fish whelks in English waters.
- UK and EU vessels.
- Will likely carry conditions including data collection requirements and potentially other management measures if deemed necessary.

Implementation by:-

MMO, Defra & Industry groups

...ambitious for our seas and coasts



Policy paper

Fisheries management plan for whelk in English waters

Published 14 December 2023

Permit scheme – Progress

- Permit scheme advisory paper developed by Seafish and WMG – to be submitted to MMO and Defra imminently.
- Advisory paper will help contribute to MMO and Defra thinking.
- Engagement to gather further views prior to development.

Implementation by:-

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Policy paper

Fisheries management plan for whelk in English waters

Published 14 December 2023

- Any questions?

Email: sustainablefisheries@marinemanagement.org.uk

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Here to give the UK seafood sector
the support it needs to thrive.



Northwest England Seafood Action Plan

Presentation at MMO NW Regional Fisheries Group

10 February 2024



Introduction

- Update on recent work with the Northwest Action Plan- Thornback ray film
- Background
 - Original report on supply chain improvements in the NW made 12 recommendations
 - Our work thornback ray work has helped contribute to progressing 3 recommendations



12 Recommendations

- Recommendation 1: Employee a development officer to coordinate/facilitate workstreams
- Recommendation 2: Establish a cross-supply chain working group to discuss issues of common interest and develop projects
- Recommendation 3: Commission a study of the transport network and make recommendations on logistic solutions to provide access to markets
- Recommendation 4: Conduct an Environmental Risk Assessment (ERA) to provide reassurance of sustainable fisheries. Consider progressing sole and lobster fisheries to MSC standard
- Recommendation 5: Develop a NW Seafood branding toolkit and support a local fish festival
- Recommendation 6: Support fishing trials to promote diversification of species, where stock abundance is high
- Recommendation 7: Develop digital/social media content
- Recommendation 8: Develop a business directory to promote and signpost Business-to-business opportunities
- Recommendation 9: Deliver a “want to sell your own catch” event in the region
- Recommendation 10: Investigate the scope and feasibility for a remote auction
- Recommendation 11: Promote and facilitate greater access to FaSS funding
- Recommendation 12: Support development of bait freezing facilities to sell under-utilised species

Reminder- Thornback rays- what we heard

- Plenty of thornback rays on the fishing grounds in the NW
- Fleetwood fish market were keen to see a steadier supply at the market but also of other premium catch (turbot/plaice)
- But fishermen felt it's not worth catching as can't get a good price for the skate wings
- Looked at retail and trade sectors and species sustainability, and thought thornback ray could use a bit of promotion and help showcase the Northwest



Thornback ray- Filming in the NW

- In September, spent three days in the Northwest with seafood chef CJ Jackson, documenting the journey of the thornback ray.
- The journey began filming in Maryport and Whitehaven, capturing the catching sector in action.
- We filmed vessels approaching the harbours, unloading their catch, and also conducted interviews with various local fishermen.
- Next, we travelled to Fleetwood, where we attended the Fleetwood auction and observed skilled blockmen processing various species, including skinning the thornback ray.



Thornback ray- Filming in the Billingsgate

- A few weeks later, we visited Billingsgate Market, where CJ runs her seafood kitchen and seafood school.
- We purchased ray wings sourced from Oban Fish.
- With the help of young influencer Max Burns, CJ prepared four delicious dishes, showcasing the incredible variety of meals that can be created with thornback ray.
- All the footage was compiled to create an engaging and insightful journey, following the thornback ray journey from ocean to plate.



Promoting the film

- Seafish website:
 - Full 12 min film *The Journey of the Thornback Ray- From Catch to Plate*
 - Thornback ray Factsheet
- Sharing the videos across social media
 - 3 smaller “taster” clips
 - Promoted on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter
- Press release to media outlets



<https://www.seafish.org/seafood-for-life/seafood-stories/thornback-ray-from-north-west-english-waters-to-your-plate/>

Thornback ray factsheet

- The factsheet provides information on identification, sustainability, and nutritional benefits.
- We have designed it so that members of the industry such as processors, fishmongers, and markets can download the document and readily share it with customers who have any questions.
- We hope it can be a useful resource so please share with others who might want to use it.

Thornback Ray
Q&A

January 2025



Q: What is a thornback ray?

A: The thornback ray (*Raja clavata*), often known as roker, is a species of fish frequently caught around the UK and Ireland. Like other skates and rays, they are a bottom dwelling species found over shingle and sand.



Q: Is the thornback ray a sustainable food choice?

A: Thornback ray caught by bottom trawl in the Irish Sea, Bristol Channel, and Celtic Sea North are rated 2, a good choice for sustainability. (Marine Conservation Society, January 2023), indicating that they are not overfished or subject to overfishing.




Q: How do I know that this information is reliable?

A: The information comes from the latest scientific report by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), which assessed the thornback ray population in the Irish Sea, Bristol Channel, and Celtic Sea North.

The population is measured by catch rate. In 2023, 8.37kg of thornbacks were caught per hour, significantly higher than the safeguard limit set by ICES of 1.63kg.

ICES advised a maximum annual landing of 1,833 tonnes in 2023. The fishing industry landed 872 tonnes—well below the recommended limit. For 2025-2026, ICES has advised a slightly lower annual landing limit of 1,699 tonnes. If landings remain consistent at current levels, they will continue to fall well within sustainable thresholds.

This indicates that thornback rays are a healthy stock able to support sustainable fishing now and in the future.




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January 2025

Q: How can I identify thornbacks from other species of skates and rays?

A: Thornback ray is a medium-sized ray that can grow up to 130 cm in length. It has a marbling pattern from dark brown to grey, with a white underside. Thornbacks are easily identified by the numerous thorn-like spines on its upper surface and along its light and dark banded tail.


Generically labelled 'ray/skate wings' can include unsustainable species, therefore, it is important to check which species you are buying, and where they are caught.




Q: What are the nutritional benefits of eating thornback ray?

A: Thornback rays are very nutritious. They have:

- 15.1g of protein per 100g (raw) which is higher than eggs, lentils, quorn and tofu, mussels and oysters. Protein is important for growing and maintaining muscle mass.
- High amounts of omega-3 fats, which contribute to normal vision, brain function and blood pressure.
- No saturated fat, unlike other fish, such as mackerel, salmon and seabass, and most other plant proteins.
- Essential vitamins and minerals (B3, B6, B12 and phosphorous) that help reduce tiredness and fatigue, support normal functioning of the immune system, and the regulation of hormonal activity.
- Government guidance recommends 2 portions of sustainably sourced seafood weekly. Thornback ray counts as one of your non-oily options.



Scan to find out more:



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Response and Feedback received

- In the first week
 - Video on the website watched 355 times.
 - The video made up more than half (51.8%) of views/visits on our YouTube channel
 - Was the second most viewed page on the Seafish website with 372 page views (only beaten to the top spot by the Home page)
- Social Media
 - Reached 60,000 people through paid and organic content
 - Average engagement is 8.8% (industry average 4%)



Response and Feedback received

"Bravo CJ Jackson and Seafish for this initiative"

"love this!"

"Skate/ray is utterly delicious! Let's keep championing it and educating the consumer"

"Watched the full video yesterday, fantastic from beginning to end"



Thornback Ray Film- Next Steps

- Promote film and factsheet to restaurants and fishmongers in the NW
- Looking to rerun the campaign in September/October
 - With some new content created from unused film- especially on the recipes
 - Create recipe cards for download



Next steps in the NW...

- Other work:
 - Market analysis on thornback ray sales
 - Developing a transport proposal
 - Looking to arrange a supply chain group meeting for the beginning of April
- Please get in touch if you want to be informed of next meetings or discuss anything about our work



Thank you

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